



Briefing 17/24 July 2017

Home to School transport for SEND children: Reducing costs and enhancing outcomes

Part 2 of 2: Resource efficiencies, Income Generation and increasing Effectiveness (for Part 1, see Briefing 17/23)

To: All contacts

Key points

- The cost of Home to School SEN provision is a significant burden on all upper tier authorities, placing pressure on the service to contain costs and innovate.
- Resource allocation may be reduced through multi-skilling of Drivers, the allocation Personal Assistants on the basis of Children's needs and by optimal use of vehicles through effective route-planning.
- The briefing also explores options for developing the service to operate commercially and means of enhancing the overall effectiveness of the service to meet wider strategic objectives.

Introduction

Under the Education Act 1996, local authorities, with responsibility for Education (LEAs) are under a duty to ensure suitable travel arrangements are made for eligible children to attend school. One group of children who fall in to the eligibility criteria are those who cannot be reasonably expected to walk to school given mobility problems or because of Health and Safety issues related to their special educational needs or disability (SEND).

In a context of reducing resources, local authorities are engaged in seeking to deliver cost efficiencies across service areas and the following outlines a framework for considering where these can be delivered in arranging Home to School transport for SEND children, in a context of promoting sustainability and ensuring physical and environmental wellbeing.

Opportunities for generating cost efficiencies may fall within the following areas:

- **Demand** – can we reduce demand for the service? (see Part 1)
- **Resources**- can we reduce the resources needed?
- **Income Generation** - can we operate the service commercially?
- **Effectiveness** – can we enhance the effectiveness of the service, better serve the aims of the whole organisation and thereby reduce spend elsewhere?

Resources- can we reduce the resources needed?

A recent APSE Network Query report¹ (see Appendix 1 for a summary of responses) considered the use of Personal Assistants (PAs) and related responsibilities of drivers. Of the 10+ authorities included in the Network Query, two allocated PAs on the basis of need only and two had set quotas related to vehicle capacity; one authority employed the use of 2 PAs per 32 seater vehicle and another employed 2 per 22 seat vehicle and 1 per 16 seat or 8 seat vehicle. Most employed a minimum allocation of 1 PA per vehicle, and allocated a second on the basis of the needs of the children.

Drivers fulfilled a wide range of responsibilities: Most were employed in the escorting of the children in some way, except in one authority where their responsibilities were related to the vehicle only. One authority trained drivers in the same way as Personal Assistants so they were available to support the children in every way they might need whereas another was responsible solely for watching those children, still in the vehicle while the PA escorted children to and from their destination.

The report indicated that resource requirements may be reduced through the multi-skilling of staff, enabling drivers to serve as personal assistants as well as their driving duties and also through the allocation of PAs on the basis of need; Where PAs are allocated on the basis of a set quota, there is a risk that staff will accompany children unnecessarily, which entails an unnecessary cost but also negates an opportunity to enable children to move from the vehicle to their destination independently.

The Network Query report also identified a wide variety of vehicles and approaches to sourcing fleet for Home to School Transport services for SEND children. The largest vehicle referenced in the report was a 32-seater coach and the smallest was a 4 seater car. Some of the authorities were using in-house fleet and some had out-sourced fleet services but most were using a mixture of out-sourced and in-house vehicles.

¹ APSE Network Query report: G0301 - Approach for allocating passenger assistants for children with special educational needs (SEN) on mini-buses or larger vehicles - 021216

Service efficiency will emerge when the maximum number of seats on each vehicle are occupied, routes are optimised and the size of vehicles and number of seats on vehicles serves each of these aims. With a changing cohort of SEND children every new school year and therefore changing service demands, optimal routes and the optimal size and range of fleet will change every year. Local authorities commissioning the service may benefit from the use of routing software, which will calculate the most efficient route between destinations, using the minimum number of maximally occupied vehicles.

Resultant routes will then need to be calibrated according to the children's needs, where children may be adversely affected by any proposed changes such as a change of PA or a significant change in the cohort of fellow travelers. The opportunity to optimize the type and number of vehicles also depends upon the nature of available fleet and so commissioners may wish to source fleet from a provider with a wide range of vehicles to enable flexibility in the range of vehicles.

One area that has often proven financially problematic is the use of taxis to cover unexpected additional journeys and changes of destination, or collect those living remotely from current routes. Spot pricing should be avoided in all but the most extreme instance and mileage prices set through a tender process. Where possible journey costs should be pre-agreed and if not a check of invoices against estimated mileage should be made often to ensure that prices charged have not been inflated or distances stretched.

Income Generation - can we operate the service commercially?

In the operation of a Home to School Transport for SEND children service, it may be that both vehicles and staff are available for commercial use in the interim periods between home to school journeys for the children.

At Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, drivers are utilised in the middle of the day to undertake various activities to support other council functions such as internal post deliveries and school meals deliveries. Nottingham City Council transitioned to a combined service for SEND Adults and Children, altering opening hours of their Adult Day centre to enable drivers to transport both children and adults to their destinations. They also moved staff on to split shifts with annualised hours contracts to minimise paid hours, surplus to organisational need. Prior to this, only 58% of drivers were utilised in the middle of the day and together with other aspects of service resign, including moving to software enabled route planning, the council saved 1.6 million in three years.²

In both these examples, the waste of staff and vehicle time is minimised through the use of staff in other council functions and/or the redistribution of staff hours to better

² APSE Network Query report TVM0139 - SEN Transport - 211014

suit the service. It may be possible to go one step further than minimising waste of and instead profit from any available resource.

The specialised transport service may be helpful for other public sector bodies, looking to transport children and vulnerable people such as schools and health services. Outside the public sector, care homes, charities and faith groups, serving the elderly may have need of such a service during the day. A less specialised market may also open up for non-vulnerable service users including sports clubs and children's parties. As some councils seek to replace bus services in rural communities with on-demand mini-bus service, it may be possible for drivers and vehicles to be reallocated to this service, which may operate commercially.

Under the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970, councils are permitted to trade with public sector bodies and make a profit and under the Local Government Act 2003 and the Localism Act 2012, councils may charge for any discretionary service such as transport hire services, providing the income does not exceed cost recovery where cost recovery may include all aspects of overheads, including those attributed to corporate management and buildings. Therefore, where accounting for income surplus to the service delivery itself, it may be assumed to be covering the wider costs incurred to the organisation in delivering the service and therefore not in excess of cost recovery but nevertheless additional to what may be possible otherwise.

To ascertain where it may be possible to generate additional income, we may ask of a driver and PA service:

Within our local area, who needs this service?

Would they pay for it?

How much is it worth?

Could we make a return on it?

"The rest is just planning and marketing" – Andy Mudd, Head of APSE Solutions

Effectiveness – can we enhance the effectiveness of the service, better serve the aims of the whole organisation and thereby reduce spend elsewhere?

Throughout the above, we have identified means of enhancing the overall effectiveness of the service through serving other strategic priorities of the council including Education, through the enabling of children to safely and successfully use public bus services, Community Development through an inclusive approach to transport provision, addressing Climate Change and improving Air Quality through the use of public bus routes and the optimisation of routes where specialist vehicles are required. The use of fuel efficient and low emission vehicles would also

contribute to this aim and further, the training of drivers in fuel efficient driving techniques.

We have also seen how drivers and vehicles can be utilised to serve other transport needs of the council, where not required for the delivery of home to school transport services for SEND children and how the service can also support the needs of Adults with Educational Needs and Disabilities through an integrated approach to service provision. Further, the enabling of independent travel among SEND young people will reduce the need for investment and training in independent travel in adulthood further delivering savings for transport services for SEND Adults. Finally, the commercialisation of the service will generate income to underpin the authorities' capacity to deliver services across the council. Taken together, these approaches help to maximise the effectiveness of service delivery.

Further to the above, approaches to workforce development and procurement practises can help to develop the local labour force and support local businesses, which in turn may strengthen the business rates base of the local area and thereby future income streams, further to the planned introduction of business rates retention. In-house services can support the local labour force by directly offering good terms and conditions of employment and excellent professional development opportunities. Out-sourced services can seek social value through contract outcomes related to skills development of staff, apprenticeship schemes and other operational approaches in support of the policy and economic aims of the council.

APSE Comment

The provision of SEND Transport is a sensitive area for local authorities, dealing with vulnerable children. A managed approach to ensuring costs are controlled is essential to ensure the service continues to provide the level of service required. A regular critical investigation of service costs can avoid unnecessary expenditure and maintain performance.

APSE Network Queries

To read the Network Query reports referenced in this briefing, available to all staff and elected members within APSE member authorities, please e-mail your request to enquiries@apse.org.uk.

APSE Solutions

The APSE Solutions team can assist with service reviews, supported by an evidence base of cost, quality and productivity analysis of Home to School Transport services for SEND children. To find out more, please contact Emma Taylor, Client Coordination officer on etaylor@apse.org.uk / 0161 772 1810.

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Appendix 1 - Briefing 17 - 24 Home to School transport for SEND children: Reducing costs and enhancing outcomes (Part 2)

Q1 Do you use passenger assistants on mini-buses or larger vehicles to transport children with special education needs?

Q2 How many passenger assistants accompany on each journey?

Q3 What informs this decision?

Q4 Do drivers fulfil any PA/Escorting duties?

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
1	Y	1/ bus (max 15 children)		Yes the driver and PA work as a team and the driver is involved with all the children. They get out of the driving seat at every stop and either look after the children whilst the PA is accepting a child or greet the child and seat them. The driver and PA work together to clamp wheelchairs.
2	Y	Home to school service: 2/ vehicle (max 32 children). SLA children's work & taxi service - 1 or 2 per vehicle	Home to school service: Quota SLA & Children's work: Children's needs	May fill in for Pas with escorting duties if absent
3	Y	1 per vehicle & very occasionally 2	The second is employed where there is a particular need i.e. specific medical training/severe behavioural problems,	In-house: Yes External service: No
4	Y	May have 2	large number of children 2 if a large number of children and one (or more) have specific problems.	Drivers are not expected to undertake PA duties but will help if required. help if required.
5	Y	No set ratio	We assess each vehicle, the mix of pupils and their needs on an individual basis and make a decision as part of this assessment on what we feel is appropriate.	No, we employ our own PA's, however not all children require a PA and for those who don't the driver has responsibility for handing over to school staff

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6	Y	At least one, 2 in exceptional circumstances	The allocation of a second PA is determined following a needs assessment with colleagues in the Additional Learning Needs Unit in the Education Department and may be considered by the ALN Panel	No
7	Y	1	In-house: As requested by SEN team Hired provision: If requested for a child	Drivers are mainly responsible for the vehicle however, for example at one of our SEN schools the driver and PA will go to reception to collect as many children as they can for their vehicle and the driver will then remain with the children on the vehicle while the PA collects the rest of the children.
8	Y	No set ratio	The number of escorts depends on the complex nature of the pupils disability and their behaviour characteristics, this is decided by the education Psychologist and an OT access officer	Yes drivers, observe and monitor pupils when escorts are collecting pupils from the house. Drivers are also responsible for the clamping and securing of all wheelchairs and external equipment
9	Y	2 per 22 seat vehicle, 1 per 16 and 8 seated vehicle	Set Quota applies on some vehicles, otherwise decision is based upon need	Drivers are responsible for the load of the vehicle, W/C clients on/off lifts and all restraints. No other duties regards the children.
10	Y	1 and occasionally 2	The allocation of a second PA is on the basis of behavioural need or to avoid the need for a travel alone taxi	No
11	Y	Usually 1	Risk assessment	Yes
12	Y	1 to 3	This is dependent on the school, the number of children on the vehicle, the size of the vehicle and the level of care required. Decided by the children's commissioning service.	Yes
13	Y		Service commissioner	As necessary

Appendix 1 - Briefing 17 - 24 Home to School transport for SEND children: Reducing costs and enhancing outcomes (Part 2)

Q5 Approximately how many SEN children are transported by your authority?

Q6 What vehicles do you use?

Q7 Is the service in-house or out-sourced

Q8 Other information

	Q5	Q6	Q7
1	250	Minibuses	In-house
2	In house: 139 External contract: 118	32 seater buses	Both
3	380	In-house: Mini-buses (all wheelchair accessible) & cars External: a combination of vehicles including taxis (standard car, hackney cabs, 7/8 seat euro cabs) and minibuses (some wheelchair accessible)	Both
4	1200	Taxis and mini-buses with up to 16 seats	Out-sourced
5	500 (approx.)	Variety, 4-35 seats	Out-sourced

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6	750 (approx.)	Taxis and mini-buses	Mostly outsourced except in case of exceptional need
7	740	In-house fleet - 15 seater, wheelchair accessible vehicles Hired provision: various size vehicles - 4 - 16 seats	
8	191	Mixture of in-house fleet and taxi/minibuses	Both
9	512	We have 3x 22 seated vehicles each has 2x PA's on board. The rest of the service comprises of cars(taxi), hackney cabs, minibus (8 seats), PSV 16(3x W/C),	Both
10	915	taxis, wheelchair adaptable vehicles and minibuses.	Out-sourced
11	550	Minibuses, wheel chair accessible minibuses	Both
12	651	In house vehicles: range from 16 seaters to 35 seaters. All vehicles are wheelchair accessible apart from the 35 seaters.	Both
13	437	Taxis, people carriers and minibuses some of which are wheelchair accessible	External

